

INTERPRETER



A JOURNAL OF LATTER-DAY SAINT
FAITH AND SCHOLARSHIP

Volume 45 · 2021 · Pages 179 - 202

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Offprint Series

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ISSN 2372-1227 (print)
ISSN 2372-126X (online)

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“BELOVED BY ALL THE PEOPLE”: A FRESH LOOK AT CAPTAIN MORONI

Duane Boyce

Abstract: *In his well-known volume about the Book of Mormon, Grant Hardy focuses primarily on the book's main narrators. However, he also makes a number of observations about other figures in the book that are of particular interest, including some about Captain Moroni. In addition to those I address elsewhere, these observations range from the assertion that Captain Moroni slaughtered his political opponents in one instance, to his claim that Moroni is not depicted as “particularly religious,” to his claim that Moroni had a “quick temper.” The question is: Are such observations supported in the text? Carefully examining this question both shows the answer to be “no” and allows a deeper look into Captain Moroni.*

Although Grant Hardy's *Understanding the Book of Mormon*¹ appeared a decade ago, it continues to be a seminal volume in ongoing study of the Book of Mormon, and its influence is widely felt. Hardy naturally focuses on the book's main narrators in his analysis,² but other figures in the book receive attention along the way, including Captain Moroni.

Among Hardy's remarks regarding Captain Moroni are these seven: (1) Moroni's divine communication (reported in Alma 60:33) was an “off-the-mark revelation”;³ (2) Moroni “slaughters” his political opponents;⁴ (3) he is not portrayed in the text as “a particularly religious

1. Grant Hardy, *Understanding the Book of Mormon: A Reader's Guide* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010).

2. The narrators are Nephi, Mormon, and Moroni.

3. Hardy refers to this revelation at various points and calls it — and/or Moroni's report of it — “mistaken,” and, as mentioned, an “off-the-mark revelation.” Indeed, Hardy reports that the revelation was a “claim” made by Moroni. See Hardy, *Understanding the Book of Mormon*, 176, 177, 309n32.

4. Hardy, *Understanding the Book of Mormon*, 176.

man”;⁵ (4) he was not comparable to the sons of Mosiah in spiritual matters — despite Mormon’s claim to the contrary;⁶ (5) he can be described as being “hot-blooded” and as having an “aggressive posture,” a “quick temper,” a “blunt manner,” and “hasty suspicions;”⁷ (6) he did not possess the “typical religious virtues;”⁸ and (7) he serves as a contrast to Helaman, who, unlike Moroni, put his trust more in God than in his own expertise.⁹

These are important claims about an important Book of Mormon figure. It is striking to find a heroic character in a religious text who is not particularly religious, for example, and if true, that alone makes Captain Moroni compelling. He is clearly a man who merits examination.

I have already addressed claim (1) regarding Moroni’s revelation elsewhere.¹⁰ Though widespread, it is an error both to question that revelation and to think Moroni’s subsequent epistle to Pahoran was fundamentally mistaken. In reality, his revelation was completely accurate, and his famous epistle was substantially accurate as well.

In a forthcoming article I will address the last two claims, (6) and (7): namely, that Moroni lacked “the typical religious virtues” and also that he serves as a contrast to Helaman.¹¹ Again, we will examine the text closely regarding these claims and see what fresh insight we might gain into Captain Moroni’s character.

In this article I will focus on the four middle claims, (2) — (5), listed above. These include Moroni’s treatment of the king-men, the text’s portrayal of his religious character, Moroni’s similarity/dissimilarity to the sons of Mosiah, and Moroni’s personality (specifically the description of his possessing a “blunt manner” and a “quick temper”). By asking to what degree each of these claims is supported by the text, we can examine the record more closely and see if we gain anything fresh in our perspective on Captain Moroni.

1. Captain Moroni’s Treatment of the “King-Men”

Alma 51 reports the actions of so-called “king-men” in the Book of Mormon — a group of Nephite dissidents seeking to replace the Nephite government

5. Ibid, 175.

6. Ibid, 176.

7. Ibid., 31 (regarding being “hot-blooded”) and 177.

8. Ibid., 177.

9. Ibid., 177–78.

10. See Duane Boyce, “Captain Moroni’s Revelation,” *BYU Studies Quarterly*, 58, no. 4 (2019): 155–59.

11. See Duane Boyce, “Did Captain Moroni Lack the Typical Religious Virtues?” *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship*, forthcoming.

during a time of ongoing defense against Lamanite aggression. Eventually Captain Moroni goes to battle against these king-men. Hardy says little about this episode, noting in regard to it only that Moroni “slaughters some four thousand of his political opponents.”¹²

Hardy’s brief comment is accurate in describing the number of deaths caused by Moroni’s army. It invites our interest because of what else it seems to reveal about Moroni — namely, that the king-men were “political” opponents, that they were specifically *Moroni’s* political opponents, and that Moroni “slaughtered” them. On a general reading, these might seem like reasonable interpretations of the episode, since it includes such violence and since Moroni is such a central figure in it. Moroni might even come across as aggressive. Hardy’s use of the word “slaughter” certainly suggests that he sees a significant level of aggressiveness in Moroni’s conduct.

When we read the text to learn more about these elements of the episode, however, three features of the record invite a very different interpretation.

The King-Men Were Not Mere “Political Opponents”

First, it turns out that the expression “political opponents” is not actually an apt description of the king-men. We typically apply this term to various aspirants for political office, all of whom accept the existing political order and are simply competing for offices within it. But the king-men are depicted as actually trying to “overthrow the free government” and to establish themselves as kings with “power and authority over the people” (Alma 51:5, 8). Their aims were not what we customarily call mere “political opposition.” Indeed, theirs seems a movement intent on eliminating the very idea of political opposition.

Additionally, the perilous circumstances existing at the time would also seem to render the king-men more than mere political opponents. The Nephites had significant experience with power-seeking dissenters in their history, and they knew the threat such dissidents posed. Indeed, the war engulfing them at the time had begun through the treacherous actions of the Nephite dissident Amalickiah (Alma 46:4–7; 47; 48:4).¹³

12. Hardy, *Understanding the Book of Mormon*, 176.

13. His aims in seeking power were not benign. The text tells us (1) that Amalickiah sought to “destroy the Church of God” (Alma 46:10), (2) that he also sought to “destroy the foundation of liberty which God had granted” the Nephites (Alma 46:10), (3) that the Nephites feared being “trodden down and destroyed” by Amalickiah’s contingent (Alma 46:10, 18), and (4) that the Nephites had to rise up specifically in order to preserve their “liberty” (Alma 46:24, 28).

Moreover, the Book of Alma opens with the account of Amlici, a Nephite dissenter who also aspired to become king of the Nephites and who caused much disruption, war, and loss of life when he was denied (Alma 2, 3:1). Additional examples are found elsewhere, of course: in the accounts of the Amalekites and Amulonites in Alma 24, the Amalekites in Alma 27, and the role played by the Zoramites and Amalekites in Alma 43–44.¹⁴

The king-men in Alma 51, then, were a re-emergence of what the Nephites had seen before. They were not a new phenomenon, and the Nephites knew the devastation that followed in the wake of such power-seeking dissidents. Moreover, the king-men's disruption occurred at the very time Amalickiah was stirring the Lamanites to wage an attack on the Nephites during their ongoing aggression (Alma 51:2–12). And yet these king-men were “glad in their hearts” that the Lamanites were “coming down to battle” against the Nephites, even while the Lamanites' invasion had penetrated Nephite borders (Alma 51:13–14).

The Nephites thus had a history that informed them of the hazards associated with dissenters like the king-men. Readers of today have the benefit of future events as well. After all, when the Nephites later faced a similar danger (in Alma 61) — and *failed* to repel it — they paid a serious price: the dissidents actually took over a major Nephite city and entered an alliance to help the Lamanites overthrow Nephite society (Alma 61:3–8).

Given the circumstances surrounding the king-men in Alma 51, then — their desire to overthrow the Nephite order, their quest to amass power for themselves, the invading Lamanite army, and the gladness with which the king-men welcomed the invasion — it does not seem apt to consider them mere “political opponents.”

The King-Men Were Not Specifically Moroni's Opponents

Second, Hardy's expression makes it sound as if the king-men were Moroni's personal political opponents. He calls them “his” political opponents. But on closer reading, the text actually gives us no basis for seeing them as Moroni's personal adversaries. As we've just seen, the king-men were opponents of the Nephite order itself. The text actually depicts Moroni as moving against the king-men as the official representative of the people: he does not act until he obtains a petition from the populace and presents it to the governor (Alma 51:15). Given his representative status, it would seem to be completely inaccurate to

14. This phenomenon appears later in Book of Mormon history as well. See Alma 63:14–15, Helaman 1:14–17, Helaman 4:1–8, and Helaman 11:24 for some additional instances.

use the expression “*his* political opponents” to describe the relationship between the king-men and Moroni’s opposition to them.

The King-Men Were Not “Slaughtered”

The third feature of the text that calls for a different interpretation revolves around use of the term “slaughter.” Among English speakers that word connotes carnage — the wanton, indiscriminate killing of others. But that kind of imagery does not capture what happened with the king-men in Alma 51. Knowing the danger posed by dissidents who aligned their sympathies with the Lamanites, Moroni — as we’ve just seen — sought approval of the population through a petition and then of the governor to move against these dissenters and to compel them to cease their insurrection and to assist in defending against the invading Lamanites. He received this approval and then marched toward the king-men. When these insurrectionists “did lift their weapons of war to fight against the men of Moroni,” Moroni’s army engaged them, and it is in this context that four thousand men were slain (Alma 51:15–20). Nothing in the account suggests wanton destruction or indiscriminate killing — and this makes it hard to see how the term “slaughter” is an appropriate description of the event. It is not the term we would employ in normal English usage.¹⁵

These three features of the text, then, indicate a different interpretation than that Captain Moroni “slaughter[ed] his political opponents.” The record does not depict the king-men as mere political opponents, as Moroni’s personal opponents, or even as being slaughtered.

What the text seems to portray, instead, is Captain Moroni’s performing the normal duties of one who was charged with defending the Nephites militarily (Alma 43:16–17; 46:34). And he actually did so in ways we might not expect: although he had complete control of all the Nephite armies, and although the circumstances were highly dangerous, he obtained a petition from the Nephite populace and approval from the governor before moving against the king-men. When we appreciate these details of the record, Captain Moroni comes across as determined but certainly not as aggressive or ruthless.

15. The Book of Mormon text typically employs the term “slaughter” simply to indicate a large number of fatalities, with no indication that the killing involved was necessarily wanton or indiscriminate (e.g., Alma 2:18–19; 49:21; 62:38). English usage typically connotes such elements, however, and, to my ear at any rate, this seems the implication of Hardy’s assertion. Since it is easy to write about a large number of deaths without using a word like “slaughter,” it is hard to see why Hardy would choose that particular word if he didn’t wish to create the impression that the word connotes.

2. Captain Moroni's Spiritual Character

Hardy notes that Moroni's "patriotism and love of liberty include religion, and he is a believer, to be sure." However, he also tells us that Moroni "is not portrayed as a particularly religious man."¹⁶ He "uses the cause of religion to justify his actions (Alma 44:2–5)," but "we never actually see him engage in personal acts of faith. For instance, he never prays for aid or guidance," although his men certainly do.¹⁷ This feature of Mormon's account contributes to Hardy's later remark (which, as mentioned, I have considered elsewhere) that Moroni actually "lacks" the typical religious virtues, which include "relying upon the Lord."¹⁸

Now, this might seem like a reasonable description of Captain Moroni on a general reading of the text, but when we engage the record more carefully, specifically looking for how it presents him as "not particularly religious," what we find is surprising. Though perhaps obscured somewhat by the large military themes in the record, there is actually considerable evidence of Moroni's deep spiritual character. Some of this will be considered here; additional evidence will emerge in Section 3.

Primary Evidence of Moroni's Spiritual Character

To begin, when Hardy reports that we never see Moroni pray, he is overlooking an explicit element of the text. We are told that at the time he created the title of liberty, Moroni "bowed himself to the earth," "prayed mightily unto his God," and "poured out his soul to God" (Alma 46:13, 16, 17). We are told this over the course of three verses. Moroni not only prays but prays "mightily."¹⁹

But the text reveals far more evidence of Moroni's spiritual character than just this incident. One of them is his receipt of a detailed revelation from the Lord (Alma 60:33). The Book of Mormon is replete with examples of prophets receiving revelation in complete sentences

16. Hardy, *Understanding the Book of Mormon*, 175.

17. *Ibid.*, 174.

18. *Ibid.*, 177. Again, see Boyce, "Did Captain Moroni Lack the Typical Religious Virtues?"

19. Hardy makes brief reference in a footnote to this report about Moroni's praying (*ibid.*, 309n32), observing that "we only observe him praying once." In the first place, though, this tepid description ignores the way Moroni's prayer is actually described in the text, and, in the second place, this acknowledgment, though completely understated, still contradicts Hardy's claim in the body of his book that we "never" see Moroni pray for aid or guidance. Hardy allows the report in his text to stand, even though his footnote straightforwardly contradicts it.

— and here Moroni does the same. And it is reported in a text that closely associates such divine communication with personal spiritual devotion.²⁰ Hardy overlooks this aspect of Captain Moroni's experience, no doubt because, as mentioned earlier, he considers it an "off-the-mark revelation" and "mistaken."²¹ Contrary to Hardy's view, however, this revelation — also as mentioned earlier — was actually accurate;²² it is therefore a significant indicator of the very spiritual character that Hardy questions in Moroni.

It is also significant that Moroni completely frames the title of liberty itself in sacred terms. The first words Moroni writes on the title are "in memory of our God" (Alma 46:12), and he identifies those he is defending specifically as those "who have taken upon us the name of Christ" (Alma 46:18). He adds that God will not allow them to be destroyed if they do not fall into transgression (Alma 46:18), and he specifically invites the people to rally around the symbolism of the title of liberty "in the strength of the Lord" (Alma 46:20). In what appears to be an abbreviation of a lengthy sermon, he simultaneously implores the people to "keep the commandments of God," quotes the prophet Jacob from the brass plates in order to provide the context for the title of liberty, and ends by framing it all in terms of "the faith of Christ" (Alma 46:23–27). As a rallying cry for the people to defend themselves from their aggressors, it does not seem too much to call it a spiritual tour de force.

Moreover, when Moroni exults in the Nephites' success in military defense, he specifically attributes the victory to "our faith in Christ" (Alma 44:3). He also speaks of the "all-powerful God" and considers the duty of the Nephites to defend their families as something "sacred" (Alma 44:5). He also declares that the Nephites "owe all our happiness" to "the sacred word of God" (Alma 44:5) and explains the purpose of the Nephites' defense against Lamanite invasion in terms of "our religion and the cause of our God" (Alma 54:10). He expresses fear of a Being he describes as "my God" (Alma 60:28) and further explains that he is engaged in defense specifically to honor "the covenant which I have made to keep the commandments of my God" (Alma 60:34). Repeatedly,

20. Lehi, Nephi, Jacob, Alma₁, Alma₂, Nephi (son of Nephi), and multiple other prophetic figures illustrate this connection. Of course, from time to time the record shares divine commands for rebellious figures to repent (see, for example, 1 Nephi 3:29; 16:39; Mosiah 27:11–19; Helaman 5:21–49), but in all other instances, those who receive divine manifestations are spiritually refined and earnest.

21. See again, Hardy, *Understanding the Book of Mormon*, 176, 177, and 309n32.

22. See again Boyce, "Captain Moroni's Revelation," 155–59.

he not only refers to God but speaks of him personally: “*my* God or *our* God.” Moroni also appeals to the corrupt governors who were neglecting the defensive effort specifically in terms of their duty to “the word of God” (Alma 60:34, 35) and sorrows because of their rebellion against God (Alma 62:2). He also says at this time that if he must leave part of his army in order to contend with dissenters, he will leave “the strength and the blessings of God” upon the soldiers who remain, knowing that “because of their exceeding faith,” no other power “can operate against them” (Alma 60:25). He ends by declaring he is not seeking for power or the “honor of the world” but instead for “the glory of my God” (Alma 60:36). Again: *my* God.

Note, too, that when Captain Moroni gives Zerahemnah’s army a chance to end their aggression and enter a covenant of peace, he not only attributes the Nephites’ success against them specifically to God (as seen above: see Alma 44:3) but also tells Zerahemnah that the Nephites’ faith in Christ “is the true faith” and that God will continue to support and preserve the Nephites as long as they “are faithful unto him, and unto our faith, and our religion.” He then commands Zerahemnah to deliver up his army’s weapons and cease their aggression, and he does so “in the name of” (a) “that all-powerful God, who has strengthened our arms that we have gained power over you;” (b) “our faith;” (c) “our religion;” (d) “our rites of worship;” (e) “our church;” (f) the “sacred” support that the Nephites owe their wives and children; and (g) “the sacred word of God” (Alma 44:3–6). He then says he cannot go back on his word “as the Lord liveth” (Alma 44:11). Moroni frames the entire discussion with Zerahemnah in terms of the Lord and of faithfulness to him. Thus, not only does Moroni speak at length about God to the Nephites when rallying them to defend themselves, but he also does the same even to an enemy.

These and all other statements we have seen by Moroni clearly indicate spiritual devotion. They also make it hard to think that Moroni’s patriotism and love of liberty merely “include” religion, as Hardy says of him. It actually seems to be the reverse. Moroni specifically tells us he is engaged in defense because of his covenant to keep the commandments of God (Alma 60:34) and that the purpose of resisting Lamanite invasion was “the cause of our God” (Alma 54:10). He also tells us he is preserving the Nephites’ “rights,” “privileges,” and “liberty,” specifically “that they might worship God” (Alma 43:9). Moroni’s commitment to God would seem to be primary — and that includes and even requires his commitment to liberty (indeed, Mormon tells us the Nephites’ liberty was granted to them in the first place by God; see Alma 46:10). Hardy’s formulation thus

actually has Moroni's categories backward; according to the text, it is not that Moroni's love of liberty is primary and includes his religion but that his religion is primary and includes his love of liberty.

To fully appreciate Moroni's motivation, it is important to remember that the Book of Mormon depicts the Lord as commanding the Nephites to defend themselves. As long as they are not aggressors themselves and bear offense, the Lord tells them that "ye shall not suffer yourselves to be slain by the hands of your enemies" and "ye shall defend your families even unto bloodshed" (Alma 43:46–47 also 48:14–16). And we also see that Moroni goes to battle against traitors in the government precisely because the Lord instructs him to do so (Alma 60:33). It is no surprise, then, that more than once Moroni explains his defense of the Nephites in terms of "sacredness" and of God's commandments (Alma 44:5, 60:28, 34).

In appreciating what the text tells us about Captain Moroni, we also see that he is concerned with more than just "patriotism and love of liberty," as Hardy puts it. It turns out that at least equally significant is Moroni's need to protect Nephites' *lives*. Mormon tells us that Moroni's interest was the "welfare and safety of his people" and that the Nephites defended themselves against their enemies "to preserve their lives" (Alma 48:12–14). They knew the Lamanites would destroy any Nephites who followed God (Alma 43:10). Indeed, we learn that Moroni and the Nephites generally fought to prevent their wives and their children from being "massacred by the barbarous cruelty" of those who would destroy them (Alma 48:24). This was one of the Lamanites' explicit aims: to "slay and massacre" the Nephites (Alma 49:7), a report consistent with the earlier description of the Lamanites as "a hardened and ferocious people" who "delighted in murdering the Nephites" (Alma 17:14). It is also consistent with the report that the Nephites "were not fighting for monarchy nor power" but for preservation of their lives and their families' lives (Alma 43:9–10, 45, 47).

Secondary Evidence of Moroni's Spiritual Character

Additional insights into Moroni's spiritual character appear when we attend to what others say about (or to) him. Mormon is central in this regard because he is the narrator of the account. Since the text depicts him as working from primary documents, Mormon's reports would seem to be credible. It is significant, therefore, that Mormon tells us Moroni's very first effort in preparing the Nephites to defend themselves from Lamanite assault was to prepare them spiritually — to be faithful

to the Lord (Alma 48:7). Indeed, Moroni's purpose was to allow the Nephites to "live unto the Lord their God" and to maintain "the cause of Christians" (Alma 48:10). He also reports that Moroni's heart "swelled" in thanksgiving to God, that he was a man "firm in the faith of Christ," and that he "gloried" in keeping the commandments of God (Alma 48:12, 13, 16). Similarly, he informs us that Moroni gloried in "doing good" and tells us that "if all men had been, and were, and ever would be, like unto Moroni, behold, the very powers of hell would have been shaken forever; yea, the devil would never have power over the hearts of the children of men" (Alma 48:16, 17). He also informs readers that Moroni was a man "like unto Ammon," that he was like "the other sons of Mosiah," and that he was even like Alma (Alma 48:18) — high priest at the time and someone who had seen angels and beheld the Lord (Alma 36:5–22).²³

Given Mormon's access to primary documents, such reports are significant. It does not seem likely that people not truly devoted "swell with thanksgiving to God," "glory" in keeping his commandments, "glory" in doing good, or invite comparison to prophets of God. Moreover, such references by Mormon are consistent with what we have already seen the record to show directly, namely, that Moroni regularly frames matters in terms of God and of devotion to his will. Helaman (son of Alma and keeper of the Nephite records) apparently saw the same spiritual quality in Moroni. He prays that God will keep Moroni "continually in his presence" (Alma 58:41) and refers to Moroni as "my dearly beloved brother" not only in war but "in the Lord" (Alma 56:2). And Pahoran, even though he felt wrongly censured, nevertheless called Moroni "my beloved brother" (Alma 61:21) and told him that he rejoiced in "the greatness of your heart" (Alma 61:9).

Examining Hardy's claim thus gives us a perspective on Moroni we might not have fully realized before. Though engulfed in military conflict, both primary and secondary evidence depict Captain Moroni as a man of genuine spiritual devotion. He seems no different from Nephite generals throughout the Book of Mormon (several of whom are specifically designated as prophets) who were motivated by their commitment to God. And as mentioned earlier, more textual evidence of this will emerge in the following section.

All this works against the interpretation that Moroni uses references to God not out of genuine spirituality but to "justify his actions." It

23. Hardy questions Mormon's comparison of Moroni to Ammon and the other sons of Mosiah, but his basis for doing so is completely inadequate. See the upcoming section, "3. Captain Moroni's Similarity to the Sons of Mosiah."

might seem that way on a surface reading, but when we look closely, the evidence of Moroni's genuine spirituality seems too overwhelming to explain some of his words as mere attempts to validate his conduct.

3. Captain Moroni's Similarity to the Sons of Mosiah

Another level of insight emerges as we consider Hardy's treatment of Mormon's well-known praise of Captain Moroni. It is praise, quoted above, that includes his comparison of Moroni to Alma, Ammon, and the other sons of Mosiah (Alma 48:11–18). Hardy doubts the accuracy of this praise, however, saying that "a little reflection suggests that Moroni is not, in the end, very much like Ammon and the sons of Mosiah, who were missionaries rather than warriors, renounced power, humbled themselves, suffered willingly, and reached out to the Lamanites."²⁴ This apparent discrepancy is an example of what Hardy means when he says that "some space opens up between what Mormon says and what he actually shows us."²⁵

It turns out, however, that there is actually no discrepancy between Moroni and the sons of Mosiah. I demonstrate elsewhere that Moroni's life repeatedly displays both humility and his suffering willingly.²⁶ That leaves "renunciation of power" and being "missionaries rather than warriors" as bases for asserting a spiritual contrast between Captain Moroni and the sons of Mosiah. These might seem like obvious differences, and it might seem to make sense, therefore, to indicate them in painting a picture of Captain Moroni. Closer examination, however, suggests a different picture entirely. Three important features of the text help us see this.

Comparable Renunciations of Power

First, evident in the record is that Moroni could have claimed complete power for himself if he had wanted to. We are told that he had "all command" of the Nephite armies and "the government of their wars" (Alma 43:16–17). The text also reports that he "had power *according to his will* with the armies of the Nephites" (Alma 46:34). Possessing such power, and in the context of his pressing military situation and its exigencies, Moroni could easily have managed a military coup and assumed authority over Nephite society if he had wanted to — just as Amalickiah and other ambitious Nephite dissidents had attempted in the past. This was particularly the case when Pahoran became chief judge with seven years left in the war (Alma 50:39–40; 62:39–43).

24. Hardy, *Understanding the Book of Mormon*, 175.

25. *Ibid.*, 174.

26. See again Boyce, "Did Captain Moroni Lack the Typical Religious Virtues?"

Pahoran was indecisive when treason erupted in his government, and he took the necessary action to counteract it only when he received clarity of direction and purpose from Moroni (Alma 61:19–20). Apparently Moroni could have secured power with ease during such tumultuous times, but he didn't. Nor did he at any other time.

Power was within Moroni's grasp, then, just as surely as it was within the grasp of the sons of Mosiah. But he renounced it, just as they did, expressly declaring: "I seek not for power, but to pull it down" (Alma 60:36).

Contrasting Circumstances

Second, it is a fundamental logical mistake to draw a conclusion about their relative spiritual character by contrasting the wartime behavior of Moroni with the missionary activities of the sons of Mosiah. The comparison is fallacious because it overlooks the radical difference in their circumstances.

Note, for example, that all the activities of Ammon and the other sons of Mosiah occurred on Lamanite lands. They were interlopers in that hostile territory, and they behaved accordingly. As they met Lamanites (for Aaron and the others this was primarily in their synagogues), all they sought was to teach the gospel. The Lamanites they encountered were not unjustly invading the land of the sons of Mosiah and attacking them and their families; indeed, these missionaries had no families. They were alone in the Lamanites' own territory, visiting their synagogues, facing no risks other than to themselves.

Captain Moroni's situation was completely different. The record tells us that when he encountered Lamanites, they were invading Nephite lands and doing so specifically to attack and kill Nephites. They were not giving sermons in Nephite synagogues. And the threat was not to Moroni as a lone individual. As we have seen, the threat was to all of Nephite society — to wives, children, the elderly, and an entire way of life. Time and time again his people were under military attack.

The circumstances faced by Moroni and the sons of Mosiah, then, could hardly have been more different, and this makes it unjustified to indicate a contrast between them without accounting for this radical difference. This becomes more obvious when we consider that one of the sons of Mosiah — Ammon — behaved exactly like Captain Moroni when he faced circumstances similar to Moroni's. He killed a number of Lamanite marauders and maimed others at the beginning of his missionary labors (Alma 17:26–39; 18:16). Later, when Lamoni's father threatened him, Ammon's response was to engage him in battle, defeat

him, and then threaten (twice) to kill the king if he did not fulfill Ammon's righteous desires (Alma 20:1–24).

When we account for the difference in their circumstances, then, the appearance of any important distinction between Captain Moroni and the sons of Mosiah evaporates. This is particularly apparent when we see them in similar settings: when situated in violent circumstances, Ammon behaved exactly the way we see Captain Moroni behave when he was situated in violent circumstances.

Comparable Spiritual Character and Contribution

Third, in pointing out that in contrast to Moroni, the sons of Mosiah "were missionaries rather than warriors," Hardy seems to be indicating that Moroni would have been a better, more spiritual person if, like the sons of Mosiah, he had chosen missionary service rather than military service. While such a view might seem plausible on the surface, the text does not actually sustain it.

Moroni's Appointment

One thing to notice at the outset is that Moroni was appointed to be general of the Nephite armies (Alma 43:16). Whether by advancing through the ranks in the normal manner or (more likely, given his age) by receiving this specific appointment due to his lineage, Moroni became the highest ranking general by assignment. There is no evidence that he was free to simply abandon this military obligation and do something else — such as missionary work — instead. For all we know, he wasn't even allowed to go on a mission because of his prior military obligation.

The Lord's Command that the Nephites Defend Themselves

Also important to note is that while the text depicts the sons of Mosiah as directed to go to the Lamanites to teach the gospel (Alma 17:11), it also depicts the Nephites as directed to defend themselves from Lamanite attack. The Lord told the Nephites (of whom Moroni was one) that "inasmuch as ye are not guilty of the first offense, neither the second, ye shall not suffer yourselves to be slain by the hands of your enemies" and also that "ye shall defend your families even unto bloodshed" (Alma 43:46–47). The record is clear that the Lord both expected his people to defend themselves and that he helped them do so.²⁷ Thus, while it is true that, based on their own earnest

27. The Book of Mormon frequently depicts the Lord as helping the Nephites defend themselves and of Nephites being "strengthened," "delivered," or "preserved" by the Lord. See Alma 2:16–19, 27–31, 16:5–8, 43:22–24, 44:3–5, 57:25–26, 35, 36, 58:33, 61:13, 21; W of M 1:14; Helaman 4:24–25, 7:22, 12:2; 3 Nephi 4:10, 31, 33.

desires (Mosiah 28:1–5), he directed the sons of Mosiah to preach to the Lamanites, it is also true that he directed the Nephites to defend themselves *from* the Lamanites.

The Need for Nephite Defense

The Lord’s instruction that the Nephites defend themselves was not an idle command. The Nephites *needed* to defend themselves — which means they did not remotely face a simple choice between doing missionary work on one hand and defending themselves on the other. They had to defend themselves regardless of any missionary efforts. This is demonstrated in the account of the sons of Mosiah themselves. Keep in mind that the Lamanites launched wars against the Nephites during the entire time the sons of Mosiah were laboring among them²⁸ — and in at least some of these wars, these assailants included those who had actually been taught by the sons of Mosiah.²⁹ Thus, while it is true that these sons’ missionary labors certainly paid off in the long run for the Lamanites, it is also true that in the short and medium run, their loved ones back home were suffering attack and death from those very same Lamanites. The Nephites had to defend their lives and their society *despite* these sons’ missionary labors.

Note also that the missionary success of the sons of Mosiah — while significant and even miraculous — was still only partial. While they converted thousands, there were also thousands they did not convert — and such belligerents continued their aggression against the Nephites and the new converts unabated (see Alma 24, 25, 27, 28). The record thus belies

I treat this topic at length in *Even unto Bloodshed: An LDS Perspective on War* (Salt Lake City: Kofford Books, 2015), 89–108.

28. The sons of Mosiah embarked on their mission in the first year of the reign of the judges and continued for fourteen years (Alma 17:4, 6). The first war during that fourteen-year period occurred in the fifth year (Alma 2) and the second, “not many days after” (Alma 3:20). The third war occurred six years later (Alma 16:1), and we are told of another attack “in the fourteenth year of the reign of the judges” (Alma 16:12). The text thus reports four wars launched by the Lamanites during the missionary labors of the sons of Mosiah.

29. That those who became converted were involved in at least some of these attacks is certain. The text tells us that many Lamanites, after having suffered the losses and tribulations of war, began to remember what they had been taught by Aaron and other missionaries, and this led to their conversion (Alma 25:6). In addition, King Lamoni’s father — who became converted — held a position of preeminence among the Lamanites during at least part of the time the Lamanites were launching these wars (Alma 20:8; 22:1). His position would obviously have guaranteed involvement in the aggression.

any notion that if only the Nephites had done missionary work rather than defending themselves, they could have converted their enemies and eliminated the need for self-defense altogether. Missionary success is rarely as total as that, and the sons of Mosiah themselves demonstrate this.

There is no reason, then, to treat the Nephites' self-defense as mutually exclusive with missionary work. The record demonstrates that there was actually an important place for both.³⁰ Moroni himself, then, can hardly be faulted for being engaged in one of these causes and not the other.

Moroni's Efforts as a Blessing to the Nephites and to the Lamanites

While it is easy to see the missionary efforts of the sons of Mosiah as certainly blessing the Lamanites, it is equally apparent that Moroni's later military efforts just as certainly blessed the Nephites. As part of the Lord's command that the Nephites defend themselves, he was key in preventing them from being overrun and killed by their Lamanite aggressors.

This later proved a major benefit to many of the Lamanites as well. After all, the Lamanites converted by the sons of Mosiah — who came to be called the people of Ammon — eventually emigrated to Nephite lands for their safety (Alma 27:5–26) since the Lord knew that if they stayed, they would “perish” (Alma 27:11–12; see also 43:11). Even this move didn't make them safe enough, however, and they had to move yet again — at which time they were protected from attack by Moroni and his formidable army (Alma 43:4–22).

Regarding the Ammonites, then, the efforts of the sons of Mosiah and of Moroni completely converged. These people were converted by the sons of Mosiah and their lives were subsequently saved by the army of Moroni.³¹

30. The ongoing need for both seems to be the case generally. The text depicts the Lamanites as prone to attack and to wage war against the Nephites from the beginning (see, for example: 2 Ne. 5:14; Jacob 1:10; 7:24; Enos 1:20; Jarom 1:6; Omni 1:10, 24; Mosiah 9, 10, 19–21; and W of M 1:13–14). A complete discussion of the Nephites' defensive actions against this aggression appears in Boyce, “Did Captain Moroni Lack the Typical Religious Virtues?” But the text indicates that the Nephites also tried to do missionary work. It speaks of efforts to “restore the Lamanites to the knowledge of the truth” and reports that they did so “diligently” (see Jacob 7:24; Enos 1:11–14, 20). The desire to bless the Lamanites is certainly evident in the Nephite record-keepers: they maintained the plates precisely to benefit “our brethren the Lamanites” (Jarom 1:2; Mormon 5:12–21, 7:1–10; Moroni 1:4, 10:1–4).

31. The same was true, of course, of Nephites' self-defense even prior to Captain Moroni. After all, if the Nephites had not defended themselves at the time the sons of Mosiah were performing their missionary labors, (a) they would have

Mormon's Standard of Comparison

It is also important to notice what Mormon says immediately after he reports that Moroni was like the sons of Mosiah. He instantly compares Captain Moroni to Helaman and others who were preaching and baptizing among the Nephites at the time and says that those so engaged “were *no less serviceable*” to the people than Moroni (Alma 48:19). Helaman was high priest over the Church at the time and had been given the sacred records by his father Alma (Alma 37:1–12, 46:6). And yet here, in Mormon’s mind, *Moroni* is the standard; he says that Helaman was no less serviceable than *he* was. And this comes from a Book of Mormon figure who knew well both the spiritual and defensive sides of the coin; the text reports that Mormon saw the Lord at age fifteen, that he received numerous revelations from the Lord (including producing content — aside from his editorial contribution — bearing the authority of scripture), and that he also spent his life embroiled in war to defend the Nephites — and even died with a sword in his hand.³²

Mormon’s praise of Moroni is specifically spiritual — including, as we saw in Section 2, the report that Moroni’s first effort in preparing the people against Lamanite assault was to implore them to be faithful to God. But in addition Mormon actually sets Moroni as the standard when he speaks of Helaman, high priest over the Church.

Captain Moroni and the Sons of Mosiah: Summary

Thus, while “reaching out to the Lamanites” was of course a highly sacred and beneficial effort, it is hard to see how it was more sacred and beneficial than the Nephites’ protecting themselves from murder and overthrow. The sacredness of the Nephites’ defending themselves is evident in the Lord’s explicit command that they do so as well as in the help he provided them in defending themselves. Since the text shows that both missionary and military efforts proved to be necessary, and since it also shows both to have been manifestations of God’s will, it does not seem justified to suggest a spiritual distinction between Captain Moroni

been overrun by the Lamanites, (b) their society would have been destroyed, and (c) there would have been no safe territory to which the converted Lamanites could then have emigrated for their safety. As the Lord foresaw, they would have been victims of ongoing attacks and ultimately destroyed (Alma 27:11–12). In terms of benefits, then, even earlier self-defense by the Nephites converged with the missionary efforts of the sons of Mosiah.

32. See, for instance: Mormon 1:15; 3 Nephi 30; Moroni 8; Helaman 12; Mormon 7; 8:10–11; Moroni. 7–9; Mormon 2:2; 8:3.

and the sons of Mosiah on the basis that the latter were missionaries whereas the former defended the Nephites from murder.

Completely aside from Mormon's personal comments, then, the text (as we saw in Section 2) provides persuasive evidence that Moroni's spiritual character was similar to these missionaries' own spiritual character. When we consider their contrasting circumstances, combined with their equal obedience to God's commands in those contrasting circumstances, their similarities — not their differences — stand out. When we look closely, it seems easy to see why Mormon would compare them.³³

4. Captain Moroni's Personality

As a final matter, we also gain insight into Captain Moroni when we examine Hardy's various descriptions of his personality. He approvingly refers to Richard Bushman's description of Moroni as "hot-blooded," for example,³⁴ and also describes Moroni in terms of a "blunt manner, quick temper, aggressive posture, and hasty suspicions."³⁵ Since we see Moroni engulfed in war, and since the realities of war include times of desperation and dread, such views of his character seem to make sense. The moral judgment inherent in them seems to make sense as well. After all, no one would consider this a list of positive characteristics — and neither does Hardy. Given what he has already asserted about Moroni's lack of religiosity, his false revelation, his lack of kindness and humility, his dissimilarity to the sons of Mosiah — and the like — Hardy evidently sees these characteristics both as possessed by Moroni and as deficiencies, all of which, again, might seem to make sense on a general reading.

A closer look at the text paints a different picture, however. I have shown elsewhere, for example, that Moroni was not at all "hasty" in his suspicions about treasonous activity in the government at the time he wrote his famous epistle in Alma 60 (to which Pahoran responded in Alma 61). The text displays him as having more than suspicion — he

33. It might also be relevant to consider the sons of Mosiah's backstory of fighting against the Lord's church for years. It is not implausible that they might have been motivated in part by a debt they felt they owed to the Lord's church and that their efforts therefore took the form of specifically *building* the church. This is certainly how they felt toward the Nephites: we are told that they strived "zealously" "to repair all the injuries which they had done to the church" (Mosiah 27:35). This might account for part of the reason for the particular path they took.

34. Hardy, *Understanding the Book of Mormon*, 31.

35. *Ibid.*, 177.

had received revelation — and it turned out to be completely accurate.³⁶ Similarly, I have shown elsewhere that Moroni cannot remotely be described as “aggressive.” The record displays him as fighting only in defense and as showing surprising generosity toward his attackers — despite the future threat they might pose once spared.³⁷ Moreover, Moroni also exhibited kindness and humility in the way he conducted himself³⁸ and also fought in the first place only because it was God’s explicit command to do so.³⁹ Such patterns would seem to belie any blanket description that Moroni had “hasty suspicions,” an “aggressive posture,” or that he was “hot-blooded.” When we look closely, the text does not show any of these to be apt descriptions.

“Blunt Manner” and “Quick Temper”

All of this suggests that we also ought to look carefully at the claims that Captain Moroni had a “blunt manner” and a “quick temper.” As we do so, a significant textual feature stands out almost immediately: namely, the overall context of threat that frames Captain Moroni’s entire presence in the record. Danger surrounds him from beginning to end. Most modern readers have never faced anything like the prospect of their loved ones being maimed, dismembered, or murdered by sword-wielding assailants. Most have never been responsible to protect even one life against violent attack, much less the lives of a whole society. Yet that’s exactly what

36. See Boyce, “Captain Moroni’s Revelation,” 155–59.

37. I cover these dimensions of Captain Moroni’s conduct at length in an upcoming paper, “Captain Moroni and the Sermon on the Mount: Resolving a Scriptural Tension,” *BYU Studies Quarterly* 60 no. 2 (2021), forthcoming. Although a thorough discussion is required, a sample of relevant passages includes: Alma 43:9–10, 45, 47; 44:1, 19–20, 50:25–36, 48:10, 12–14, 24, 49:7, 52:32–39, 54:6–11, 55:18–24, 56:46, 60:17, 61:10, 62:14–28.

38. See Duane Boyce, “Did Captain Moroni Possess the Typical Religious Virtues?” *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship*, forthcoming.

39. As seen earlier: (1) the Lord told the Nephites that “inasmuch as ye are not guilty of the first offense, neither the second, ye shall not suffer yourselves to be slain by the hands of your enemies” and also that “ye shall defend your families even unto bloodshed” (Alma 43:46–47); (2) Captain Moroni explained that it was explicitly because of God’s commandments that he took up the sword to defend the cause of his country (Alma 60:28, 34); (3) he explained that resisting Lamanite invasion was “the cause of our God” (Alma 54:10); and (4) he went to battle against traitors in the government precisely because the Lord instructed him to do so (Alma 60:33).

the text shows Moroni facing — repeatedly over nearly fifteen years.⁴⁰ It is easy, therefore, for modern readers to be uncomprehending about the circumstances of war and particularly about the extremity of the danger faced by Moroni. Since such threatening circumstances are foreign to most of us, it can be hard to fully appreciate their effects. Nevertheless, to appreciate them is important, since this context is an important feature of Moroni’s entire presence in the record.

“Blunt Manner”

With such context in mind, consider first the claim that Moroni had a “blunt manner.” This is a broad generalization, so as we read it is natural to ask: “Who exactly received blunt treatment from Moroni and under what circumstances?” As we study the record, we discover it was neither Teancum nor Helaman. Nor was it Lehi, Nephihah, Gid, or Antipus. Captain Moroni interacted with all these Nephite leaders, so if he had a generally blunt manner, we might reasonably expect it to show toward these men. But it doesn’t.

It turns out that the two most dramatic incidents of Moroni’s bluntness were his denunciations of the Nephite enemy Ammoron in Alma 54 and of the treasonous Nephite governors in Alma 60.

In the first case, it is useful to remember that Ammoron was a violent aggressor continuing a long war and seeking the death and destruction of Nephite society. In speaking bluntly of justice, God’s anger, hell, and the like, Moroni told Ammoron (1) that he was in danger of the “wrath of God” and (2) that he was “a child of hell” (Alma 54:11).

There is no doubt this was a blunt manner of speaking, so the real question is if — as Hardy seems to presuppose — it was *objectionable* for Moroni to speak in this way.

On reflection, it is hard to see how it would be. The text presents Ammoron as evil, after all, so it is not as if Moroni is speaking falsely. Additionally, Ammoron was certainly a far more threatening and wicked figure than Zeezrom — and Amulek called *him* “a child of hell” (Alma 11:23). It is also noteworthy that, in his excoriation of the Pharisees and scribes, Jesus found occasion to call each of them a “child of hell” (Matt. 23:15) — and of course that is only one example of the

40. In the beginning of the eighteenth year of the judges, the long conflict in the Book of Alma begins, and Captain Moroni has charge over all the Nephite armies (Alma 35:13, 43:4, 16–17). The long series of conflicts finally ceases at the end of the thirty-first year of the judges (Alma 62:39), making fourteen years in all.

Lord's bluntness: additional instances are not difficult to find.⁴¹ Nor is bluntness difficult to find in the Lord's prophets. Among others, we see it in Elijah, Lehi, Nephi, Abinadi, John the Baptist, Jacob, Alma, and Joseph Smith.⁴² Moroni's bluntness toward Ammoron does not seem at all unique in the spiritual record.

In the second case, Moroni was writing to the Nephite governors, many of whom were not only refusing to support the armies' defense of Nephite society but also actually forming an alliance with the invading Lamanites to help them conquer and subjugate the Nephites (Alma 61:3–8). Moroni didn't know all the details at the time, but he did know, based on his revelation, that the governors were sufficiently wicked that the Lord had commanded him to go to battle against them if they did not repent (Alma 60:33). In this context he reported that many Nephite soldiers had "bled out their lives" in defense of the people and that they had to do so while simultaneously perishing "with hunger" because of the governors' neglect (Alma 60:9). He also reported that the Lamanites were "murdering our people with the sword," including "our women and our children" (Alma 60:17) and added that "thousands" were "falling by the sword, yea, wounded and bleeding" (Alma 60:22). Meanwhile, the governors were refusing to provide support, and in fact were fully complicit with the Lamanites in this devastation (Alma 61:3–8).

Moroni spoke bluntly to the governors in these circumstances, but again, it is difficult to see any reason it was objectionable for him to do so. Instead it would seem to be an appropriate moral response to the governors' completely immoral conduct. As mentioned, such blunt denunciation of wickedness does not appear to be uncommon in scripture. It actually seems to abound. Thus, while Hardy is right about Moroni's blunt manner (in these cases at any rate), it hardly follows that such bluntness was *wrong*, as he appears to assume. From Elijah to Joseph Smith to the Savior, Captain Moroni's bluntness toward evil men actually finds itself in good company.

"Quick Temper"

The episode with the Nephite governors in Alma 60 is also relevant to the claim that Moroni had a "quick temper." Moroni was certainly angry in

41. See, for example Matthew 11:20–24, 12:34; Mark 11:17; Luke 11:39–52; John 3:36; Jeremiah 7:20, 32:30; Ezekiel 21:31; D&C 1:1–16, 5:8, 19:15, 29:18–21; 45:49–50, 133:50–51.

42. See 1 Kings 18:27; 1 Nephi 1:19, 2:14, 17:44–46; Mosiah 11:20–25, 12:1–8; Matthew 3:7–10; Jacob 7:13–14; Alma 9:8, 12, 15, 30:42–55; Parley P. Pratt, *The Autobiography of Parley P. Pratt* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1938), 210–11.

this situation with the Nephite governors. As we have seen, however, the text presents him as: (1) responding to traitorous conduct, (2) acting on the basis of a direct revelation from the Lord, and (3) condemning them against the backdrop of huge travails among the Nephites — travails due in no small part to these governors themselves. Moroni's response in these circumstances is not what would normally qualify as a "quick" temper.

Nor does the episode with the king-men in Alma 51 appear to be an example of quick temper. Even though he had complete authority over all the armies, as we saw in Section 1, Moroni moved against these insurrectionists only after obtaining a petition from the people and authority from the governor. It does not seem quick-tempered for the commanding general of all Nephite armies to go to the trouble of circulating a *petition* in order to obtain approval to defend the citizenry.

Moroni's anger toward Ammoron (Alma 54–55), which we discussed above in regard to Moroni's bluntness, is also relevant to the claim of a quick temper. It is true, of course, that Moroni was angry at Ammoron. In his epistle he even threatened to wage battle on Lamanite land and to fight until the Lamanites were completely destroyed. However, Moroni did not carry through on these threats, even when he had a chance to do so. His rhetoric promised more than he was actually willing to carry out.⁴³

More important for our purposes here, though, is that Moroni's epistle to Ammoron hardly seems to qualify as "quick." At the time of this epistle, Moroni had been defending against Lamanite assault for ten years,⁴⁴ and he had seen many thousands die as a result of the Lamanites' violence. It does not seem quick-tempered to write an angry epistle after suffering death and destruction from one's assailants for a full *decade*.

It is true that Moroni threatened more in this epistle than he proved willing to carry out, but reaching a point of "boiling over" in one's rhetoric — after a full ten years — does not appear hard to understand. It would certainly be a stretch to think of it as expressing an "aggressive" nature or as being "quick-tempered." There was nothing quick about it.

It also might be thought that Moroni exhibited a quick temper when he first raised the title of liberty in Alma 46. However, although the record informs

43. See the report of Moroni's actions in Alma 55:20–24 — actions nothing like what he had threatened. Indeed, his conduct in this episode is identical to how he had behaved prior to issuing his threats against Ammoron (see Moroni's actions in Alma 52:32–39). This matter is treated more fully in Boyce, "Captain Moroni and the Sermon on the Mount."

44. Moroni became general of the Nephite armies in the beginning of the eighteenth year of the judges (Alma 43:4, 16–17), and he wrote this epistle in the beginning of the twenty-ninth year (Alma 54:1).

us that Moroni was angry at Amalickiah at the time, it seems implausible to think there was anything quick about it. Amalickiah had been rejected in his attempt to become king, and in his rebellion had gathered supporters whose explicit intent was to kill their fellow Nephites (Alma 46:1–7). The text describes the circumstances as “exceedingly precarious and dangerous” (Alma 46:7), and as we saw in Section 2, it was in response to this danger that Moroni rallied the populace to defend themselves. He did so explicitly in terms of the commandments of God and “the faith of Christ.” As in the other incidents, it is difficult to find anything in this episode that exhibits anything “quick” or unthoughtful about Moroni’s anger.

Captain Moroni’s Personality: Summary

In the end, the text appears to paint a different picture than Hardy’s general characterization of Captain Moroni — namely, that he had “hasty suspicions,” an “aggressive posture,” a “quick temper,” a “blunt manner,” and that he was “hot-blooded.” When we look at the record more closely, we gain new perspective and actually see his character to be impressive. Rather than hot-blooded and quick-tempered, his conduct toward his assailants appears well-founded, mature, and even patient (ten years would seem to be a long time by anyone’s standards). And when he was blunt, it was toward murderers and would-be murderers: exactly, so it would seem, where everyone would actually want him to be blunt.

Conclusion

Captain Moroni is vulnerable to misunderstanding largely, I think, because few of us have experienced anything like what we see in his life. Charged with the responsibility to protect Nephite lives, as well as to defend Nephite society itself from attack and overthrow, violence is the background of all we see in him.

Though ever-present as background, violence is not *all* we see. Indeed, some views of Captain Moroni are traceable to nothing more than oversight and misreading. For example, while Moroni fought at length those who sought to destroy the Nephites, he did not “slaughter” his “political opponents.” In addition, far from not portraying him “as a particularly religious man,” the text actually displays Moroni to be completely devout and spiritually earnest — indeed very much like the sons of Mosiah. Moreover, while Moroni was completely determined in his defense of Nephite lives, he was actually not “aggressive,” “quick-tempered,” or “hot-blooded” in his conduct. Finally, as has been

demonstrated in other treatments of Moroni,⁴⁵ he was also a man (1) who was spiritually refined enough to receive revelation from the Lord in finished sentences and (2) who possessed to an impressive degree the typical religious virtues — including self-sacrifice, kindness, humility, and reliance on the Lord.

In the end, the text displays a sincere man who, because of his covenants with God, was simply fighting against huge odds to defend Nephite lives and Nephite society — a man who understood the stakes and who was both devout and humble, but not timid.

For some readers, this might amount to a fresh perspective on Captain Moroni, but there is still more. A careful reading permits us to see something else as well, a little gem Mormon tucks in about halfway through his account (Alma 53:2). In it we learn that Moroni’s devotion and sacrifice went neither unnoticed nor unappreciated. We are told that Captain Moroni was “beloved by all the people of Nephi.” A careful reading of his conduct makes it easy to see why.

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45. Again, see Boyce, “Captain Moroni’s Revelation,” 155–59 and Boyce, “Did Captain Moroni Lack the Typical Religious Virtues?”

